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The Federal Diary

U.S. Mileage Rise to 16 Cents Asked



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Congress early next year will be asked to raise payments to federal workers who use their cars on official business, perhaps to as much as 16 cents a mile.

The federal ceiling on mileage payments now is 12 cents, although most agencies follow the lead of the General Services Administration and limit employees to 11 cents per mile for short-haul business trips.

Employees in some agencies get less than the 11-cent rate now, and that amount goes down to 6-cents per mile for people who use their cars frequently.

A new study by the General Services Administration puts the cost of operating a car now at 13.7 cents per mile. GSA is planning to push for a higher mileage maximum next year, most likely to 16 cents. That higher rate would not necessarily be what agencies could or

would pay, but it would provide flexibility for the government to raise car mileage payments when necessary.

Also being considered by the government is a legislative proposal for open-end authority, one that would permit the GSA to establish the maximum, and to raise or lower it when it deemed appropriate, based on actual costs at the time.

Federal officials are certain that a higher mileage allowance will be sent to Congress next year, but much could depend upon the structure of programs designed to cut fuel consumption.

Thousands of government employees drive their own cars on business for Uncle Sam—auditing programs, visiting remote work sites, tracking down tax-dodgers, on law enforcement chores and delivering the mail.

Workers have complained that the 11-cent ceiling is unrealistic, and this is what prompted the GSA study and tentative legislative package. No action will be taken on the bills this year.